

Leadership in Demanding Times

A Prayer for Leaders in Catholic Education

INTRODUCTION

Good morning, and welcome to this prayer service to begin our day. As leaders in the Catholic school system, it is good for us to draw often from the sources which inspire the distinctive nature of our work. With this in mind, let us take a few minutes to reflect on God's word, listen to the wisdom of a leader whose life made a difference among those he was called to serve, and to bring our needs before God.

OPENING SONG

Please join in singing our opening song (Sugg: *Will you Come and Follow Me*, vv. 1-3)

OPENING PRAYER

Let us begin our prayer marked by the sign of our faith: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

And let us pray. O God, we praise you for the paths of grace by which you have led each of us to leadership in the Catholic educational community. Still our spirits now, and open our hearts and minds to your wisdom as we reflect together and pray. We ask you this in the name of Jesus the Lord. Amen.

And now, let us reflect on God's word.

READINGS AND REFLECTIONS

Reading 1

A reading from the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 50:4)

The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens – wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught.

Voice 1: Who are *the weary* around me?

(pause)

Can I recall a time when my faith helped me sustain someone with a word?

(pause)

Voice 2: Open my heart and mind each day O God, to hear your voice...

All: That I might encourage others with your hope and joy.

Reading 2

A reading from the Gospel of Mark (Mk 1: 35-38)

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!"

Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come."

Voice 1: Who are the “everyones” that look for me?
(pause)
Can I recall days when I could only find silence when everyone was finally asleep?
(pause)

Voice 2: Help me to find time to rest in you, O God...

All: That I might respond to those who seek me with your wisdom and peace.

Reading 3

A reading from the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 11: 28-30)

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Voice 1: What burden in my life can I invite Christ to share?
(pause)
Can I recall a time when I found relief by giving a problem or worry over to God?
(pause)

Voice 2: Lord Jesus, give me freedom and courage...

All: To invite you to share the burdens I've been carrying alone.

REFLECTION

Ours are demanding times for leaders in Catholic school boards. Each day, people with legitimate concerns look to us for fair decisions in the shortest amount of time. New technologies shift the priorities of our organizations, requiring us to embrace new skills and prioritizing strategies. We must learn and adapt to remain effective in our planning and response to the needs around us.

It's easy to forget what sets us apart from other leaders, when responsibilities can seem more pressing with each passing year. It is good to stop and remember that Jesus and his Good News are at the heart of our organization and its mission. It is *his* wisdom and strength that carry us forward through each age.

His is the heart of a teacher, listening to the voice of the Father that he might sustain us with a word. Joined to him in Baptism, we are empowered to do the same. Jesus prays before going out to meet the needs of “everyone” who seems to be looking for him; in him we are empowered to do the same. He is our rest amid the responsibilities that weigh us down; in him, our yoke is easy and burden light.

Let us listen to the wisdom of the late Cardinal Francis van Thuan, who led his flock as bishop during fifteen years of deprivation and deep suffering in a Vietnamese prison. In his posthumously published book, *The Joy of the Gospel*, he outlines nine “Beatitudes for our time” to help leaders remedy the problems of our age:

- Blessed are those who know how to smile at themselves, they will never run out of chances to be happy;
- blessed are those who distinguish the mountain from the molehill, they will avoid many annoyances;
- blessed are those who know how to listen and keep silence, they will learn many new things;
- blessed are those who are attentive to others' requests, they will be able to share many joys;
- blessed are those who are attentive to simple things and calm in the face of important things, they will live long;
- blessed are those who know the value of a smile and avoid using disrespectful words, their paths will be full of light;
- blessed those who despite appearances, know how to generously account for the attitudes of others, they will be considered pure of heart;
- blessed are those who know how to reflect before acting and to pray before thinking, they will avoid nonsense;
- especially blessed are those who know how to see God in every person they meet, because they will find true light and peace.

(Francis Xavier van Thuan, *La Gioia di Vivere la Fede*. Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013. Quoted in: <http://www.korazym.org/11692/vivere-la-fede-raccontarne-la-gioia-la-testimonianza-luminosa-del-cardinale-van-thuan/>)

LORD'S PRAYER

Let us pause for a moment to recall all those who look to us for leadership, guidance and reassurance each day. Please feel free to mention a name or community...

(pause)

Let us gather their needs together with our own and join them to the constant prayer of Jesus on our behalf before the Father, in the words our Lord gave us: *Our Father...*

CLOSING PRAYER

Let us pray:

Lord, we thank you for the call to serve as leaders in the Catholic educational community. May your Spirit's wisdom and courage guide us as we carry out our share in the Church's evangelizing mission; may the gentle yoke of Jesus be our comfort in times of uncertainty; and may his compassion overflow in our hearts and permeate our interactions each day. We make this prayer to you in his blessed name. Amen

And may Almighty God bless us: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

CLOSING SONG

Please join in our closing song. (Sugg: *Will You Come and Follow Me* vv. 4-6.)